

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 SSO-00

NSCE-00 EB-07 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 INRE-00 SAJ-01

PRS-01 DODE-00 /055 W

----- 055078

O R 311524Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8185

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION NATO

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 13742

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: KOSYGIN ILLNESS

REF: MOSCOW 13668

1. SUMMARY. CONFIRMED SOURCING OF KOSYGIN ILLNESS STORY TO VICTOR LOUIS SHOULD BE TAKEN AS SIGNAL THAT LEADERSHIP CHANGES MAY BE IN THE OFFING, BUT WE CANNOT YET OFFER CONFIDENT JUDGEMENTS AS TO WHY IT IS BEING PUT OUT NOW, WHO AMONG CANDIDATES (MAZUROV, USTINOV, KULAKOV, OR OUTSIDES LIKE SHCHERBITSKIY OR ROMANOV) HAS INSIDE TRACK, OR WHERE CHANGES WILL LEAD. MINIMIZING THE POLITICAL FALLOUT WOULD BE A NATURAL FIRST INCLINATION FOR THE PRESENT STAND-PAT LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

2. AP MOSCOW TELLS US FULL TEXT OF LONDON EVENING NEWS STORY ON KOSYGIN ILLNESS CARRIES VICTOR LOUIS BYLINE (DESPITE HIS DISAVOWAL). OTHER CORRESPONDENTS SAY LOUIS, AFTER STREAM OF DISAVOWALS YESTERDAY, HAS BECOME "UNAVAILABLE" (AS HAVE OTHER SOVIET SOURCES WE CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVE TRIED). GIVEN LOUIS' HISTORY AS TRANSMITTER OF

AUTHORITATIVE LEAKS, CONFIRMED SOURCING TO LOUIS SHOULD BE TAKEN AS A SIGNAL THAT KOSYGIN'S STATUS MAY CHANGE IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE, WHETHER OR NOT (AND HOW SERIOUSLY) HE IS ACTUALLY ILL.

3. FIRST QUESTION IS WHY SIGNAL HAS BEEN EMITTED AT THIS TIME. FIRST "BUREAUCRATIC" DEADLINE WHICH OCCURS TO US IS LONG-PROMISED SUBMISSION OF 1976-1980 FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO SUPREME SOVIET IN SEPTEMBER. AS CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT KOSYGIN WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PRESENTATION AND PASSAGE. SIGNAL THAT HE IS ILL MAY THEREFORE BE INTENDED TO PREPARE WEST (AND, THROUGH MEDIA FEEDBACK, SOVIET PUBLIC) FOR ANOTHER FACE NEXT MONTH.

4. WHATEVER THE TIME DIFFICULTY, HOWEVER, CHANGE OF STATUS FOR A LEADER OF KOSYGIN'S RANK, RESPONSIBILITIES AND POLITICAL STATURE WILL OBVIOUSLY NECESSITATE SERIOUS "BUMPING" AMONG CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND REARRANGEMENT OF CLIENTELES BELOW (IF LATTER HAS NOT ALREADY BEGUN). IF AILING KOSYGIN IS CALLED TO REPLACE PODGORNYY IN LESS DEMANDING POST OF CHAIRMAN OF SUPREME SOVIET PRESIDUM (ONE CHANGE RUMORED LAST SPRING), CLIENTELE SHIFTING WILL BE EVEN MORE EXTENSIVE, SINCE PODGORNYY, TOO, HAS HIS NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS AND FOLLOWERS.

5. ALTHOUGH WE OF COURSE DO NOT HAVE SPECIAL ACCESS TO INNER WORKINGS OF SOVIET POLITICS TO PREDICT HOW WIDELY OR DEEPLY THE BUMPING PROCESS WILL GO WITH ANY CONFIDENCE, WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK THAT CURRENT STAND-PAT LEADERSHIP WILL WISH TO LIMIT EFFECTS TO EXTENT POSSIBLE, AT LEAST IN THE FIRST MOVE. WE WOULD THEREFORE EXPECT THAT ONE MAJOR FACTOR IN CHOOSING REPLACEMENT FOR KOSYGIN WILL BE (OR HAS BEEN) MAKING AS FEW WAVES AS POSSIBLE. AND, AS IN MOST SERIOUS POLITICAL SITUATIONS, MOST OF THE MAJOR OPTIONS OFFER PROS AND CONS IN THIS CONTEXT.

6. AMONG CANDIDATES, MAZUROV WOULD HAVE INSIDE WORK IN BUREAUCRATIC AND POLITICAL TERMS, AS FIRST DEPUTY PREMIER, IF MINIMUM EFFECT WERE PRIMARY CONSIDERATION. CONFIDENTIAL

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TION. AT THE SAME TIME, HE HAS NOT HAD THE KIND OF RECENT EXPOSURE OR ADVERTISEMENT ONE WOULD EXPECT OF A NATURAL HEIR APPARENT FOR KOSYGIN, AND WE WOULD JUDGE HIS CHANCES TO BE LESS GOOD THAN THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN A YEAR AGO.

7. KULAKOV HAS BEEN TOUTED AS A COMER OVER THE PAST YEAR, BUT HE LACKS GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE AND, OF MORE

RELEVANCE FOR TOP GOVERNMENT JOB, HE ALSO LACKS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE AND IDENTIFICATION WITH HEAVY INDUSTRY. HOWEVER IMPORTANT AGRICULTURE IS FOR THE SOVIET ECONOMY IN GENERAL AND FOR THE UPCOMING PERIOD IN PARTICULAR, AND HOWEVER MUCH KULAKOV GAINED BY POLYANSKIY'S LOSS (AND EXILE FROM THE POLITBURO TO JAPAN), AGRICULTURAL EXPERTISE IS NOT NEARLY THE PERSUASIVE CREDENTIAL FOR THE PREMIERSHIP THAT LONG AND SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT IN INDUSTRY WOULD BE. KULAKOV, THEN, LOOKS LIKE AN OUTSIDE CONTENDER.

8. ROMANOV AND SHCHERBITSKIY HAVE ALLROUND MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE, BUT ARE OUTSIDERS BY DEFINITION: NEITHER HAS SPENT ENOUGH TIME AT THE CENTER IN MOSCOW RECENTLY TO BUILD UP THE KIND OF SUPPORT AND CLIENTELES WITHIN THE CENTRAL APPARATUS WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED TOP SOVIET LEADERS. HAD THEY BEEN BROUGHT UP TO MOSCOW AT OR SHORTLY AFTER THE 25TH CONGRESS, AS WAS WIDELY RUMORED THEY WOULD BE, THEIR CHANCES WOULD BE BETTER. BUT THEY WERE NOT.

9. FINALLY, USTINOV MUST BE CONSIDERED A CANDIDATE, DESPITE THE RECENT VINTAGE OF HIS MINISTERIAL RANK (AND MARSHAL'S BATON). HIS MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE (AND REPUTATION), IF SOMEWHAT NARROW, IS SECOND TO NONE. IF THE MILITARY REMAINS TROUBLED AT HAVING BEEN PASSED OVER IN USTINOV'S FAVOR WHEN GRECHKO'S REPLACEMENT WAS CHOSEN, MAKING HIM PREMIER WOULD PROVIDE A GRACIOUS WAY OF OPENING THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, AGAIN, TO A PROFESSIONAL, PERHAPS KULIKOV. AND, LAST BUT NOT LEAST, USTINOV IS CLOSE TO BREZHNEV WITHOUT BEING A CLIENT, AND OF THE SAME GENERATION AS THE CURRENT TOP THREE, AT 67.

10. IF MINIMAL EFFECT IS INDEED A PRIMARY CONSIDERATION,
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IT MAY WELL BE THAT GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE. CHOOSING ONE OF THE (RELATIVELY) YOUNGER MEN COULD SIGNAL A TRANSITION (LIKE THE SUCCESSION OF YOUNG PREMIERS IN THE FRENCH FOURTH REPUBLIC, JUST BEFORE DE GAULLE); MORE LIKELY, IT WOULD BE READ AS A SIGNAL THAT THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD WAS UNDER WAY, BRINGING MESSY AND UNWELCOME FRICTIONS. IN THIS OPTIC, USTINOV WOULD BE THE "SAFEST", AND ROMANOV THE MOST LIABLE TO PROVOKE RISING EXPECTATIONS, WITH MAZUROV, KULAKOV AND SHCHERBITSKIY (BORN IN THE 1910'S) IN BETWEEN. THEN AGAIN, WE CANNOT ENTIRELY EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER CANDIDATES: STRANGER THINGS HAVE HAPPENED IN SOVIET HISTORY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEALTH
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MOSCOW13742
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760330-0710
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976083/aaaaacez.tel
Line Count: 168
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MOSCOW 13668
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <24 AUG 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KOSYGIN ILLNESS
TAGS: PINT, UR, (KOSYGIN, ALEKSEY NIKOLAYEVICH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006